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OMEGA MILESTONES

1892 to 2011

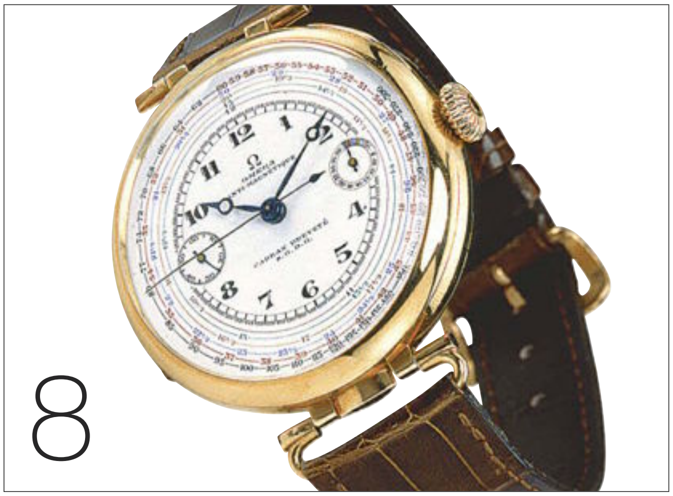
25 OF OMEGA'S MOST IMPORTANT WATCHES

August 2013

CONTENTS

Omega Milestones Special Tablet Reprint, August 2013

6



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This special tablet reprint contains an article on the 25 most important watches Omega has ever made. In it, author Gisbert Brunner describes the watches and explains their significance to Omega and to watch history. The article was first published in WatchTime's April 2013 issue and has been reproduced here as it originally appeared.

4 **OMEGA MILESTONES**

BY GISBERT L. BRUNNER

This survey of 25 of the most important watches Omega has ever made begins with the world's first minute-repeater wristwatch (1892) and includes the monopusher chronograph (1929), the Olympic timer (1932), the world's first tourbillon wristwatch (1947), the Seamaster (1948), the Constellation (1952), the Speedmaster (1957), the Mars watch (1998), the De Ville Co-Axial (1999), the Seamaster Planet Ocean (2011), and more.

ON THE COVER: Clockwise from left, Omega's Seamaster Ploprof (1970), the first Omega wristwatch (1900), the Speedmaster (1957), and the Seamaster Planet Ocean (2011).

WatchTime

THE MAGAZINE OF FINE WATCHES

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OMEGA

OMEGA
TACHYMETRE
OMEGA Speedmaster 125
AUTOMATIC CHRONOMETER
OMEGA AUTOMATIC CHRONOMETER
Constellation
OMEGA
OMEGA

MILESTONES

A survey of 25 of the most important watches Omega has ever made

BY GISBERT L. BRUNNER

1892

FIRST MINUTE-REPEATER WRISTWATCH

The world's first minute-repeater wristwatch was unveiled in September 1892 by the Bienne, Switzerland, firm of Louis Brandt & Frère, precursor to today's Omega watch company. Brandt had chosen Audemars Piguet in Le Brassus to modify a 13-ligne Lépine ébauche that Audemars had purchased from the ébauche maker LeCoultre & Cie. The striking mechanism was triggered by a slide at 3 o'clock. The complex wristwatch case strongly resembles that of a pocketwatch. Engraved on the dust cover is a phrase in French that translates as "Excluded from the competition: juror, Paris 1889." The engraving suggests that the watch had been exhibited at the Chicago World's Fair in 1893, but had not been allowed to participate in the competition for medals because César Brandt, who ran the firm with his brother Louis-Paul, had served on the jury of the Paris World's Fair in 1889.

1894

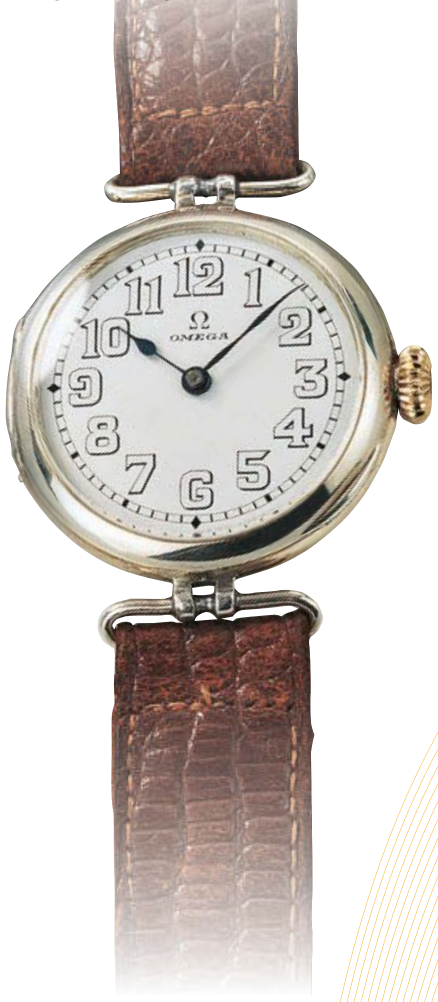
OMEGA IS BORN

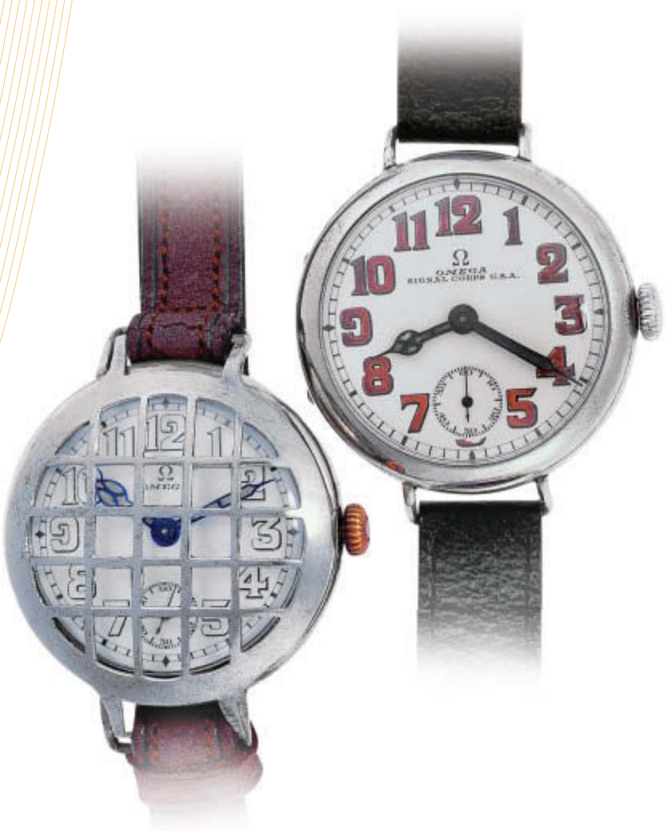
The year 1894 saw the birth of the name that would eventually identify the company: Omega. Originally the name was given to a pioneering 19-ligne pocketwatch caliber, Caliber 19, that the Louis Brandt & Frère firm began producing that year. The movement was a considerable achievement: the construction was simple but reliable, and all components could be removed and replaced with standardized spare parts. Interchangeable parts were the exception rather than the rule for watch manufacturing in this era. The idea for the name came from Henri Rieckel, the firm's banker, who felt that Omega – the last letter of the Greek alphabet – was a perfect name for a caliber that was "the last word" in watchmaking. The company introduced a collection of pocketwatches containing Caliber 19 with the Omega name on the dial. The firm registered the name internationally as a protected trademark on March 10 and April 13, 1894. It became the name of the company in 1903.

1900

FIRST OMEGA WRISTWATCH

The first wristwatches bearing the Omega name were produced in 1900 and used by British officers in South Africa's Boer War (1899-1903). Omega was one of the first firms to begin serial production of wristwatches. The watches withstood the rough treatment they got. An Omega advertisement in a watchmakers' magazine in Leipzig in 1904 publicized the testimony of a British artillery officer whose Omega wristwatch performed admirably in bitter cold, searing heat, torrential rain and merciless sandstorms. The lieutenant colonel concluded that "The wristwatch is an essential campaign element." The wristwatches were powered by a Lépine 12-ligne Caliber HN B and were available in two versions: one with the crown on the right, to be worn on the left wrist, and the other with the crown on the left for wearing on the right wrist.





1916

WAR WATCHES

During World War I, many military officers switched from pocketwatches to wristwatches. A wristwatch could be read without first digging it out of an overcoat pocket, plus it didn't have to go back into the pocket afterwards. This convenience appealed to soldiers in mile-long trenches and fortified bunkers. Omega's hand-wound, 13-ligne Caliber SO was a precise and rugged movement suitable for wartime conditions. This caliber was probably first used in 1916 in wristwatches with simple round cases made of either silver or nickel and equipped with luminous material on their hands and sometimes their dials. But the fragility of the crystals above the dials repeatedly caused problems. Martial-looking protective grids were an attempt to solve the problem. Among the early military customers was the Signal Corps of the American Expeditionary Forces, which supported the Allies starting in July 1918.

1929

MONOPUSHER CHRONOGRAPH

In the final year of the 1920s, Omega launched chronograph Caliber 39 CHRO L 17 p, a movement with a button built into the crown to operate the chronograph mechanism. The wearer pushed the crown to start it, stop it and return its hands to zero. The switching mechanism with column wheel was developed by LeCoultre in Le Sentier expressly for Omega. Omega shifted production to its own workshops in Bienne in 1934. The 39-mm-diameter Lépine movement, with a counter for 30 elapsed minutes at 3 o'clock, was notable for the extraordinarily precise positioning of the bearing bore holes. This precision improved the functioning of the mechanism. It also made it easier for watchmakers to exchange old components for new ones when they serviced the caliber. The gold model debuted in 1929: it had moveable strap lugs and a patented enamel dial with a spiral tachymeter scale capable of measuring average speeds from 10.5 to 300 km per hour.

1932

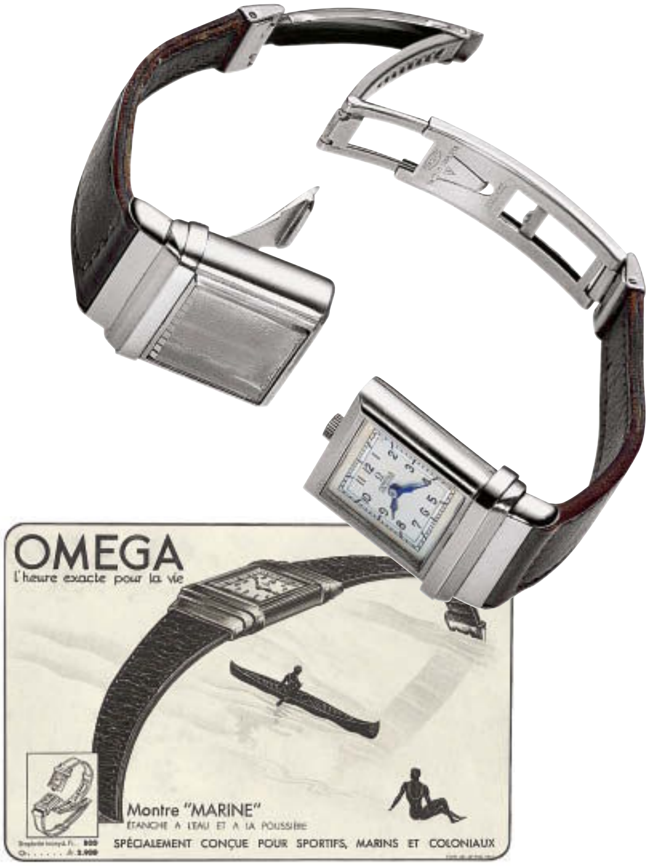
OLYMPIC TIMER

A flyer circulated at the 1932 Olympic Games proudly announced that "Omega timepieces were chosen as the only official timepieces at the 1932 Olympic Games in Los Angeles." Afterwards, the technical director of the Olympic Games, William M. Henry, praised the performance of Omega's timer, a split-seconds chronograph (type MG 1134) pocketwatch with 30-minute counter. Its movement was a top-notch, gold-plated, 24-ligne, hand-wound caliber with a Breguet balance spring and a bimetallic compensating balance with a frequency of five hertz. The watch had a diameter of about 60 mm. The seconds scale on its fine enamel dial was divided into fifths of a second. The 30-minute counter was positioned at 12 o'clock. The watch enhanced Omega's reputation as a manufacturer of highly precise timepieces. Omega had introduced the chronograph in 1930. Several variations of Caliber 53.7 CHROR, including one whose balance had a frequency of 10 hertz, were produced in subsequent years.

1932

MARINE DIVER

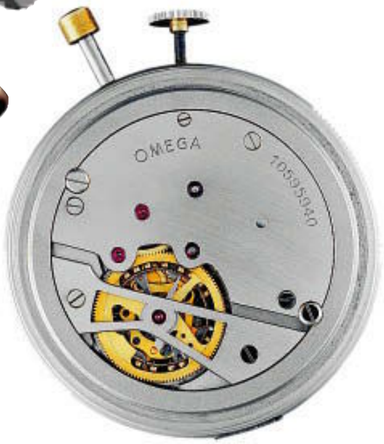
A 1942 issue of the German watchmakers' magazine Uhrmacher-Woche ("Watchmakers' Week") devoted an article to waterproof watches. "When the first waterproof watch debuted 15 years ago," the magazine stated, "many people dismissed it as fashionable foolishness or a publicity stunt because, after all, it really isn't necessary to wear a wristwatch while bathing." Maybe so, but the impulse to develop wristwatches for swimmers and divers was unstoppable. Omega introduced its first divers' watch, the Marine, in 1932. Four years later, it chose Lake Geneva as the venue for the presentation of its newest "Marine" model with hand-wound Caliber 19.4 SOB T2. It was built for people who love water, but the manufacturer was mum about how water resistant the watch actually was. Nevertheless, on June 29, 1936, the watch, which had an angular, bipartite sliding case, emerged undamaged after having spent 30 minutes in the lake at a depth of 73 meters. It bested its own performance a year later, when it withstood a pressure of 140 meters for 14 hours. Thanks to its unconventional and complex case mechanism, which still fascinates collectors today, this divers' watch was both pioneering and exotic.


OMEGA
l'heure exacte pour la vie
Montre "MARINE"
ÉTANCHE A L'EAU ET A LA POUSSIÈRE
SPÉCIALEMENT CONÇUE POUR SPORTIFS, MARINS ET COLONIAUX

1939

THE 30-MM CALIBER

Historically, Omega is Switzerland's second most prolific producer of officially certified Swiss chronometers (Rolex is first). One reason is Omega's Caliber 30 mm, a hand-wound caliber with a subdial for the seconds at the 6, introduced in 1939. Omega followed it with Caliber 30 T2 RGSC in 1943. The first number (30) denotes the caliber's diameter (30 mm). "T2" means "second transformation," i.e., a modification of the original movement. "SC" specifies the version with *seconde centrale*, i.e., a center seconds hand. "RG" is an abbreviation for *raquettière à régulateur*, an innovative fine adjustment mechanism for the index. The new caliber also had a bimetallic screw balance and Breguet hairspring. Four of these movements broke all previous records for accuracy in the 1940 chronometer competition at Kew-Teddington Observatory, earning 90.5 of 100 possible points. The British Ministry of Defense commissioned Omega to produce 110,000 waterproof wristwatches in 1943. Destined for the wrists of British soldiers, each watch contained the 30-mm caliber.



1947

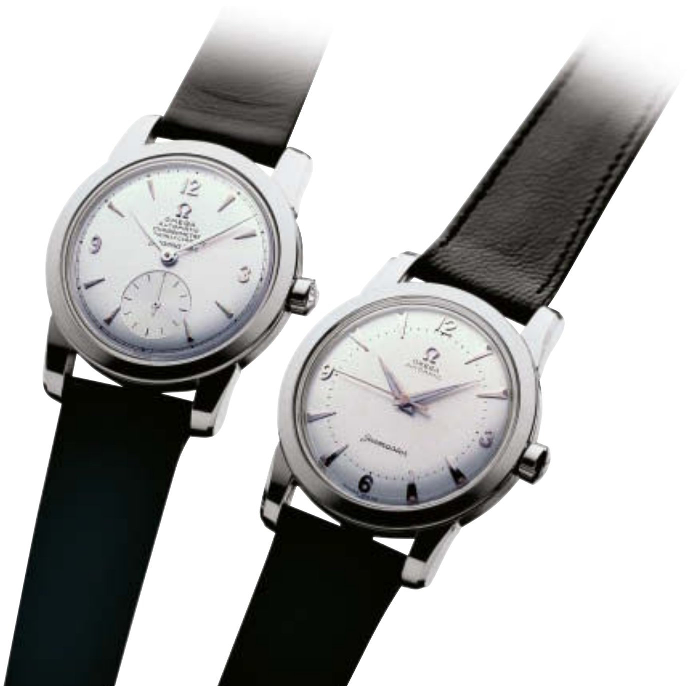
FIRST TOURBILLON WRISTWATCH

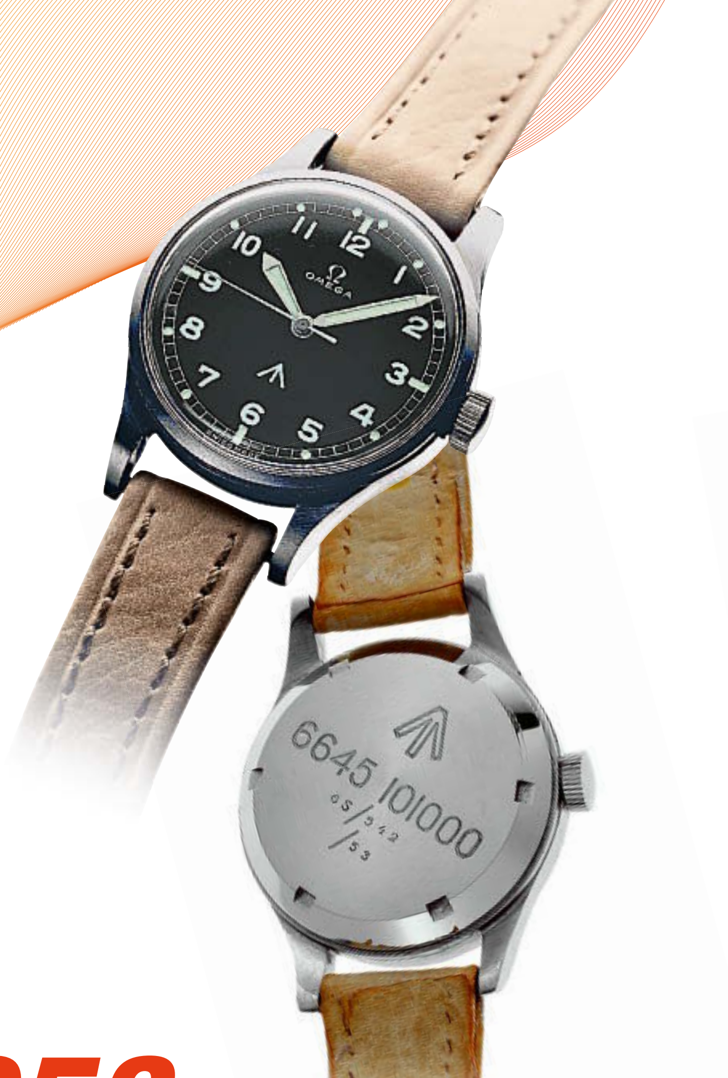
Omega was the first Swiss watch company to produce a tourbillon for the wrist. It commissioned Marcel Vuilleumier, director of the school of watchmaking in Le Sentier, to study the possibility of a wrist tourbillon. Vuilleumier was sure that a tourbillon in a wristwatch would be subjected to significantly stronger stresses than in a pocketwatch. This meant that the delicate rotating cage ought to be given more time to complete one full orbit than the tourbillon in a pocketwatch. Vuilleumier built the first wrist tourbillon caliber, 30 I, using the 30-mm movement of 1939. Noted prototypist Jean-Pierre Matthey-Claudet made 12 experimental tourbillon wristwatches for Omega. The watches were made to compete in precision competitions. Each watch's tourbillon required 7.5 minutes to rotate around its axis, a variation on the classic rate of one revolution per minute. Some of these watches achieved excellent results in chronometer competitions between 1947 and 1952 at Kew-Teddington, Neuchâtel and Geneva. One of them (tourbillon number 10.595.933) set a record high score (867.7 points) for wristwatches at a competition sponsored by the Geneva Observatory in 1950.

1948

SEAMASTER

René Bannwart is considered the father of the Omega Seamaster line. The man who would later found Corum had begun building Omega's design department in 1940. This was new. At that time, sketches for new models were usually drawn by draftsmen in watch-case factories. Bannwart's decision set Omega on a new path that other brands would soon follow. To celebrate Omega's 100th anniversary, Omega sales director Adolphe Vallat asked Bannwart to develop a sporty, robust and waterproof wristwatch. Bannwart felt that Vallat wasn't giving him enough time, so he presented one of his case designs with the comment "much too clunky." To Bannwart's surprise, Vallat was delighted. The result was the Seamaster family. It had its origins in watches supplied to Britain's Royal Air Force in World War II. The 1948 civilian version of the pilots' watch had a water-resistant case (to 50 meters), a screwed caseback with lead gaskets, a reinforced crystal, a silvered dial, and polished and riveted Arabic numerals. The version with small seconds, which was also available as a certified chronometer, contained the new automatic Caliber 28.10 RA RG-343. The model with a central seconds hand was the 28.10 RA SC-350.

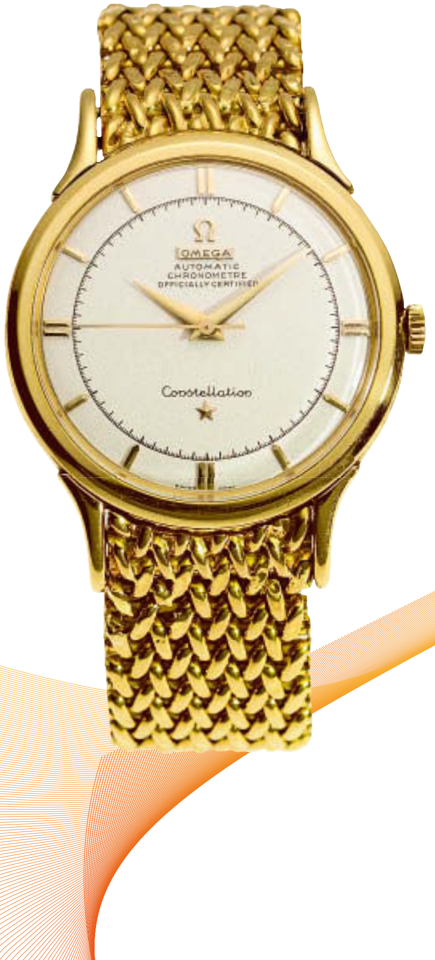




1952

CONSTELLATION

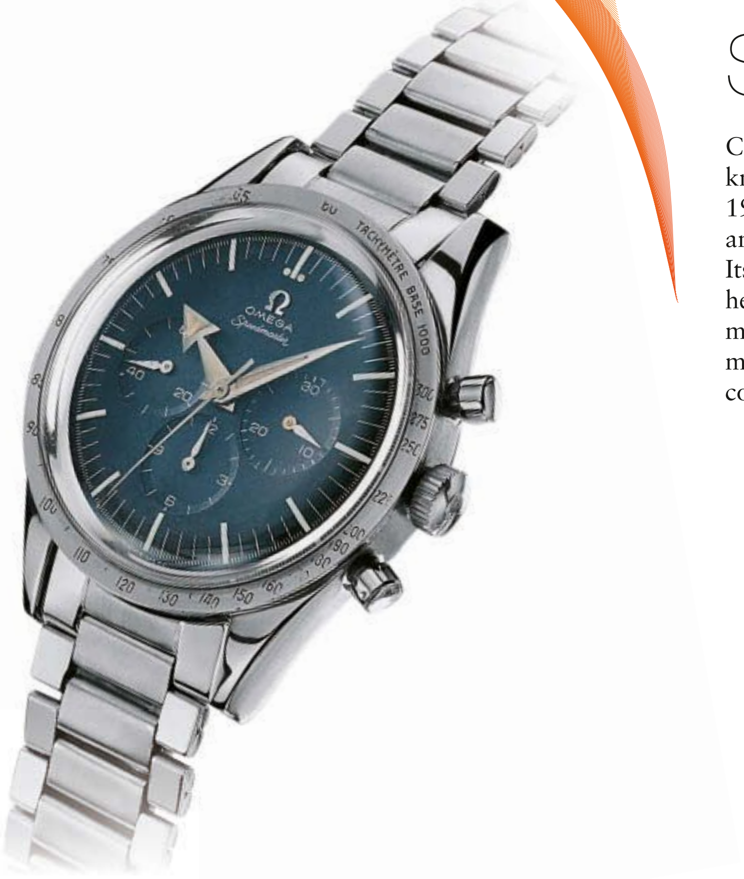
Omega began using the name “Constellation” in 1952 to denote its officially certified wrist chronometers. The premier model was powered by Caliber 28.10 RA SC PC RG AM (nicknamed the “352”), which first appeared in 1945. This caliber wound itself via a unidirectional hammer-type winding weight. It also featured an indirectly propelled central seconds hand. The 28.1-mm-diameter, 5.4-mm-thick movement passed the official chronometer tests with flying colors. Its sturdiness, reliability and precision prompted Omega to produce the Constellation in large numbers. This model was also Omega’s first serially manufactured wristwatch chronometer.



1953

RAF BROAD ARROW

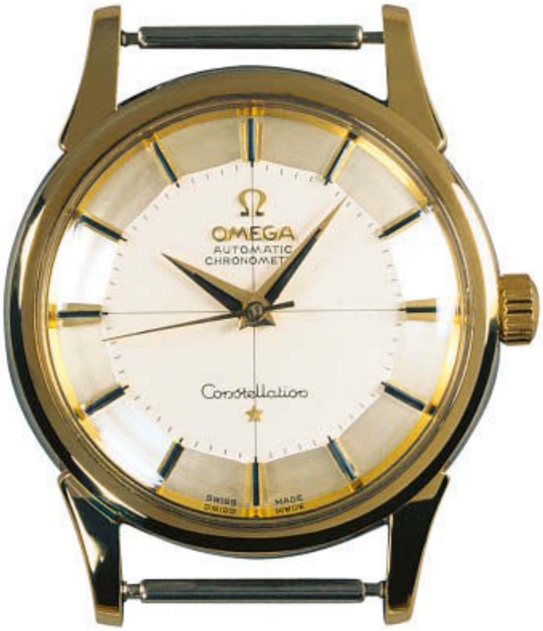
When it presented the RAF model in 1953, Omega already had several decades of experience in the production of military pilots’ watches. The RAF was commissioned by Britain’s Royal Air Force (RAF). Inside the water-resistant steel Staybrite case with screwed back and lead insulation, Omega installed the third generation of the legendary 30-mm caliber from 1939, the 30 SC T3-283. The hand-wound movement with central seconds hand was finely adjusted in four positions until its daily deviation was no more than 10 seconds. The movement was surrounded by a soft iron inner case to protect it against magnetic fields up to a maximum strength of 900 oersteds. (Ordinary wristwatches can resist only about 60 oersteds.) Its dial was 0.4 mm thick instead of the usual 0.1 mm. The 5,900 pieces produced featured the so-called “Broad Arrow” in the bottom half of the dial. (The Broad Arrow was a symbol identifying property of the British Ministry of Defense.) The inventory number was engraved on the back of the case.



1959

CONSTELLATION STAR

Connoisseurs of fine, reliable and precise automatic calibers know Omega's Caliber 551 (Caliber 27.9 RA SC Bull-551) of 1959. This 12¼-ligne movement had a diameter of 27.9 mm and a thickness, despite its winding mechanism, of just 4.5 mm. Its Glucydur balance had a frequency of 19,800 vph. With the help of a patented reverser, the oscillating weight wound the mainspring in both directions of rotation. The caliber was remarkably successful and turned the Constellation model that contained it into a star.



1957

SPEEDMASTER

The Omega Speedmaster, destined to become the most famous chronograph in the world because of its use by NASA for the Apollo program, was introduced in 1957. But the Speedmaster story really begins in 1943 with chronograph Caliber 27 CHRO C12, developed by Jacques Reymond. Born into a long-established family of watchmakers, Reymond had joined Omega's subsidiary Lemania in 1942. The "CHRO" in the caliber designation stood for "chronograph," the "27" referred to the movement's diameter in millimeters, and "C12" denoted the additional counter for 12 elapsed hours. Further developed by Albert Piguet in 1946 and christened by Omega with the shorter name "321," this movement was the smallest of its type at the time. Credit for the Speedmaster case design belonged to a group at Lemania, including designer Claude Baillod, prototype-maker Georges Hartmann and machinist Désiré Faivre. The watch's salient features were a black dial, luminous hands, a tachymeter scale, water-resistant case, screwed back and domed Plexiglas crystal. The diameter was originally 39 mm. A 40-mm version with the tachymeter scale on a black background along the flange appeared in 1960.

1967

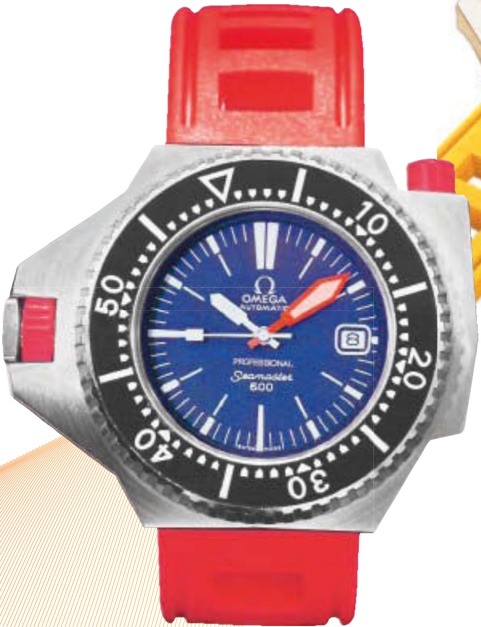
DE VILLE

Omega launched De Ville as a separate line in 1967. It had been a collection within the Seamaster line since 1960. Simpler, younger, more colorful, and more varied than the Seamaster, it quickly became Omega's best-selling collection. The name stood for an entire philosophy because the De Ville wasn't created at Omega's headquarters in industrial Bienne, but in sophisticated Geneva. The collection was intended to represent a new urban elegance. The designers had sought and found a modernistic element in wristwatch design. The collection included rectangular models containing the ultra-slim hand-wound Caliber 620. The synthesis of modernity and timelessness turned out to be just right. Omega De Ville wristwatches won six "Golden Roses" at the Baden-Baden design awards in the 1970s as well as the coveted Grand Prix Triomphe de l'Excellence Européenne.

1970

SEAMASTER PLOPROF

In 1970, Omega developed a different and extremely sturdy Seamaster to meet the needs of professional divers who were descending to greater depths. The Seamaster 600 Ploprof (short for *plongeurs professionnels*, French for "professional divers") was water resistant to 600 meters. The conventional case construction of the Seamaster 300 of 1957 simply wasn't able to withstand that much pressure. Omega technicians opted for a monocoque (single piece) case that had been patented (number 480.680) in 1967 and milled from a solid block of steel. There were only two ways for water to enter the case. One was through the opening for the crown. To prevent that, Omega developed a specially protected and threaded crown. The other way water could enter was through the joint between the case and the crystal. Omega prevented that by pressing the crystal, made of mineral glass with a nonreflective coating, onto the O-ring with 120 kg of pressure. The Ploprof had no helium-release valve because the case was designed to prevent helium from entering it in the first place. A blocking system with a button at 2 o'clock prevented unintentional repositioning of the dive-time bezel. The watch was powered by Caliber 1002.



1973

SPEEDMASTER 125

To celebrate its 125th anniversary, Omega produced the world's first officially certified automatic chronograph produced in series, the Speedmaster 125. It manufactured 2,000 Speedmaster 125 watches. They were powered by Caliber 1041. The watch was developed by Raoul Henri Erard of Lemania. It showed the seconds and the elapsed minutes from the dial's center and had a counter for 12 elapsed hours at 6 o'clock. A 24-hour display at 9 o'clock showed whether it was day or night. The dial was available with various additional scales (tachymeter, telemeter, pulsometer or decimal subdivisions). In 1978, the Russian cosmonaut Vladimir Dzhanibekov wore the Speedmaster 125 aboard the Soyuz 26 and Soyuz 27 space flights to the Salyut 6 space station.

1974

MEGAQUARTZ 2400

Omega first exhibited prototypes of this caliber at the Basel watch fair in 1970. The Megaquartz 2400 owed its existence to technical cooperation between Omega and the Batelle Institute in Geneva. The engineers achieved this caliber's infinitesimally small rate deviation of just one second per month with the aid of an encapsulated quartz resonator with a frequency of 2.4 megahertz. After extensive research, Omega unveiled Caliber 1511 in 1974. It was the first caliber to earn the title of "marine chronometer" from the Astronomic and Chronometric Observatory of Neuchâtel. After 63 days of tests, the daily rate deviation was a mere 2/1,000s of a second, or 0.73 seconds per year. It was the world's most precise wristwatch. It was also the first watch equipped with a "TSA" (time-zone and second adjustment) device that enabled the wearer to reset the hour hand for the time in a different zone without affecting the minutes and seconds hands. Furthermore, the seconds hand could be stopped to synchronize the watch with a time signal.

MARINE CHRONOMETER
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Coefficient thermique
Ecart de proportionnalité
Reprise de marche
20
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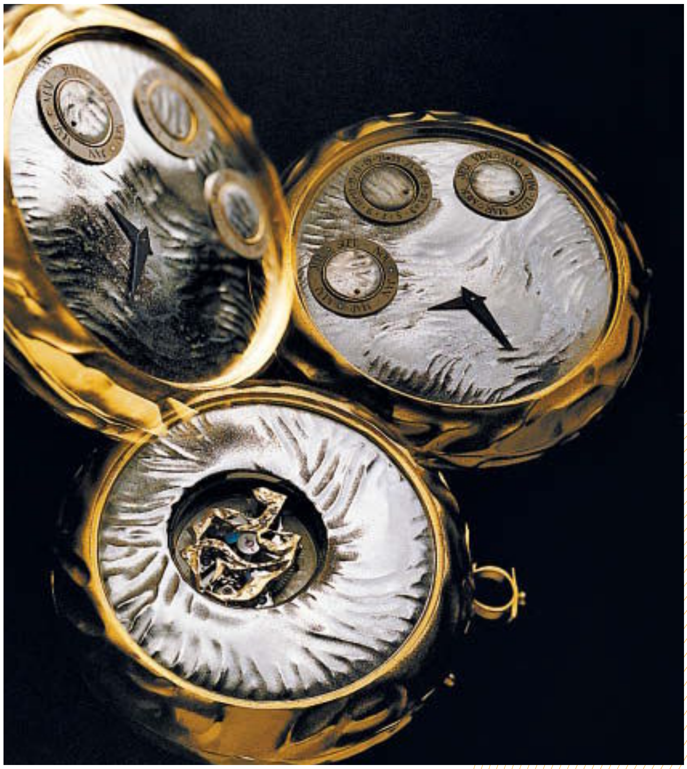
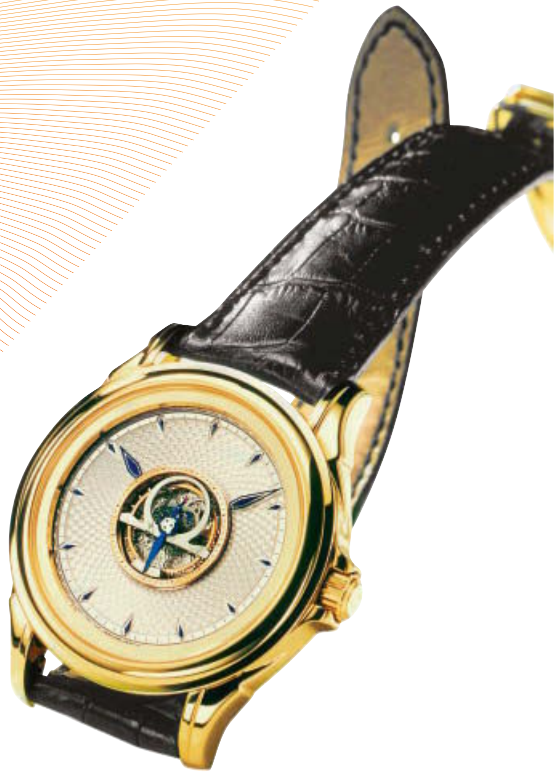
1985

SAND WATCHES

Visitors to Omega's stand at the annual watch fair in Basel in 1985 could admire a treasure chest containing six unconventional pocketwatches: the Montres des Sables or Sand Watches. They were so named because of their unusual appearance, which suggested a desert landscape. The watches were the brainchildren of Dominique Loiseau, who had impressed connoisseurs the previous year with his highly complicated La Rose des Temps table clock, which performed 32 functions. Each of the six pocketwatches was equipped with a seven-millimeter-thick flying tourbillon. The cases were only 12 mm thick. In addition to displaying the hours and minutes and containing a tourbillon, each boasted a different feature: perpetual calendar, minute repeater, day-night display, moon-phases, puzzle, or a display of five Muslim prayers. The price for the collection was about 250,000 Swiss francs.





1994

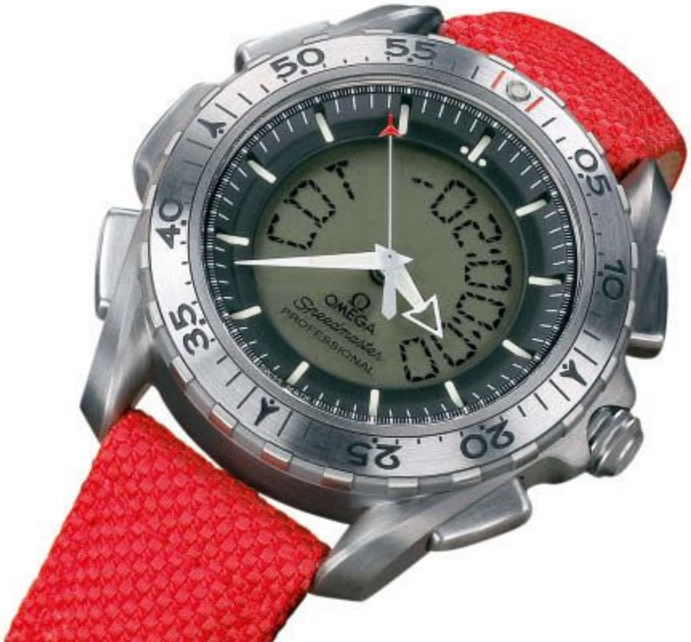
FIRST CENTRAL TOURBILLON

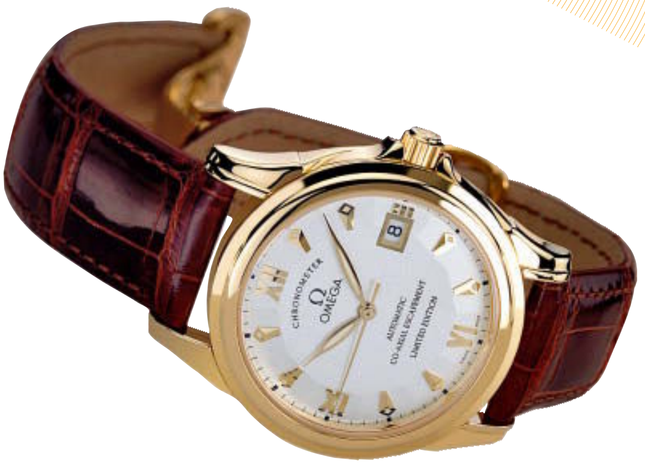
Omega marked the 100th anniversary of the Omega name with a world first: a watch with the tourbillon mechanism in the center. There was no bridge above the rotating carriage to interfere with the view. This was a flying construction, with the tourbillon cage carrying an eye-catching Omega symbol and a small seconds hand. The hands for the hours and minutes moved "mysteriously," i.e., without visible means of propulsion, above the guilloché dial. The trick: the hands were printed onto thin, nearly invisible disks of transparent sapphire. The hour and minutes disks were set via a separate crown integrated into the caseback. On this unconventional automatic movement, Caliber 1170, the rotor (made of platinum and iridium) was fixed to the back of the case. The watch had a 54-hour power reserve.

1998

MARS WATCH

The Omega Speedmaster Professional X-33 watch was developed over a span of five years through Omega's collaboration with American and European astronauts and pilots of the Blue Angels and Thunderbirds. The watch was designed so it could be used inside space shuttles (hence the "Mars Watch" nickname) and by someone wearing gloves. The watch had a titanium case and a hybrid, analog-digital display. Its movement, Caliber 1666, with a quartz regulator, displayed universal time and had a marathon chronograph that tallied each mission's elapsed time. The alarm for the universal time was very loud in order to be heard over noises in the shuttle. The volume reached a maximum level of 80 decibels. Additional complications were a 1/100-second chronograph and a countdown function. The date could be displayed in the international format (month/day/year) or European style (day/month/year). All of the digital functions of the caliber could be controlled via the crown and four pushers. The figures and legends on the digital display were legible in the dark thanks to high-powered illumination. The X-33 had an accuracy of between -0.3 and +0.5 seconds per day. The case was water resistant to 50 meters. The watch could withstand temperatures ranging from -20 to +70 degrees Celsius.





1999

CO-AXIAL ESCAPEMENT

The Omega De Ville Co-Axial contained automatic Caliber 2500, the first wrist chronometer with a co-axial escapement. The escapement was invented by English master watchmaker George Daniels. Omega developed Daniels's design so that it could be manufactured in large quantities. Caliber 2500 was a modified self-winding movement from Omega's Swatch Group sister, ETA. The co-axial escapement went a long way toward solving two fundamental problems that had plagued long-lasting precision timekeeping. First, every change in the viscosity of the lubricant oil detracted from the regularity of the rate behavior. Second, over time, the oil gradually disappeared from the locations where it was most needed in the movement. Daniels revised the architecture of the impulse-giving elements to reduce both the friction and the influence that the lubricant's viscosity exerted on the balance's amplitude. Unlike conventional escapements, his co-axial escapement consists of an intervening wheel, a co-axial wheel and a lever with three pallet jewels. The lever acts only when the balance swings counterclockwise. To fully exploit the advantages of this escapement, 27-jewel Caliber 2500 had a Glucydur balance with a frequency of 28,800 vph and a flat, freely swinging hairspring. The movement debuted in a simple round case for which Omega reactivated the name "De Ville."

2007

HOUR VISION

Omega's De Ville Hour Vision chronometer made headlines when it was launched in 2007. In 2000, Omega had begun developing an exclusive automatic movement, Caliber 8500, under the direction of the design engineer Marc-André Miche. The fabrication was originally done in cooperation with Omega's sister company, ETA, but is now performed entirely in Omega's workshops. Caliber 8500 was equipped with an upgraded version of the co-axial escapement. It boasted other new features, including a rotor with zircon bearings that seldom required servicing, an innovative reverser wheel that polarized the rotor's rotations, two serially switched, DLC-coated barrels for 60 hours of power, and a reworked profile on the gears' teeth. An added bonus was that the movement supported an independently adjustable seconds hand. The case's sides were made of transparent sapphire, affording a view into the movement.

2010

CO-AXIAL LADYMATIC

Wristwatches for women have played an important role at Omega since the early years of the 20th century. The company highlighted its ladies' models again in 2010 with the revival of the Ladymatic line. Launched in 1955, the Ladymatic was Omega's first ladies' automatic wristwatch. In the new collection, women can choose between rose gold, yellow gold or steel, with or without diamonds. Each model has a polished 34-mm-diameter case. The caseback is transparent, inviting the watch's owner to admire the co-axial Caliber 8520 or Caliber 8521 with a silicon balance spring.

2011

PLANET OCEAN LIQUID METAL

Omega entered uncharted waters in 2011 with the introduction of the 32.5-mm-diameter and 7.6-mm-thick self-winding Caliber 9300. Among its most innovative features is a complex escape wheel with unusually elongated teeth, manufactured using photolithographic LIGA technology. The movement relies on a black balance with a frequency of four hertz and a variable moment of inertia. The watch has a silicon hairspring. Two mainsprings team up to provide more than 60 hours of power. Omega installs two serially switched barrels coated with DLC to minimize friction. The rotor, which winds in both directions, is positioned above the movement and runs on ceramic bearings. A column wheel controls the chronograph functions. A vertical coupling connects the movement with the chronograph when the stopwatch function is switched on. The case of the Seamaster Planet Ocean is particularly appealing thanks to the bezel's colored, scratch-resistant inlays, which are manufactured using the brand's own liquid-metal technology.

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